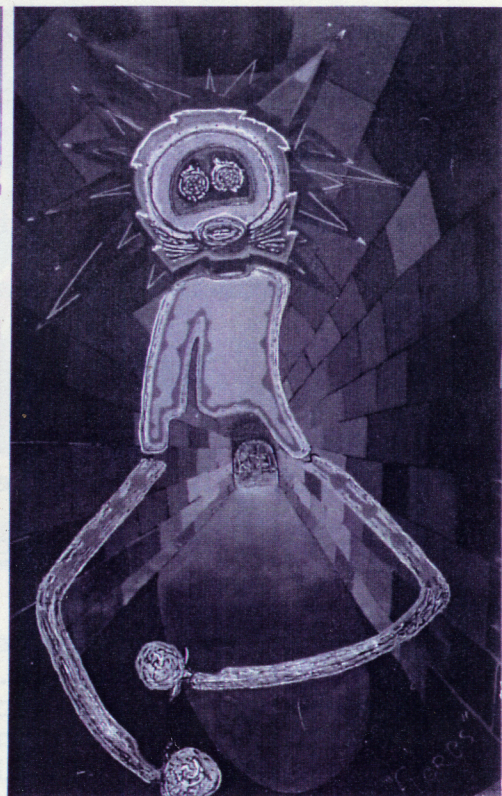
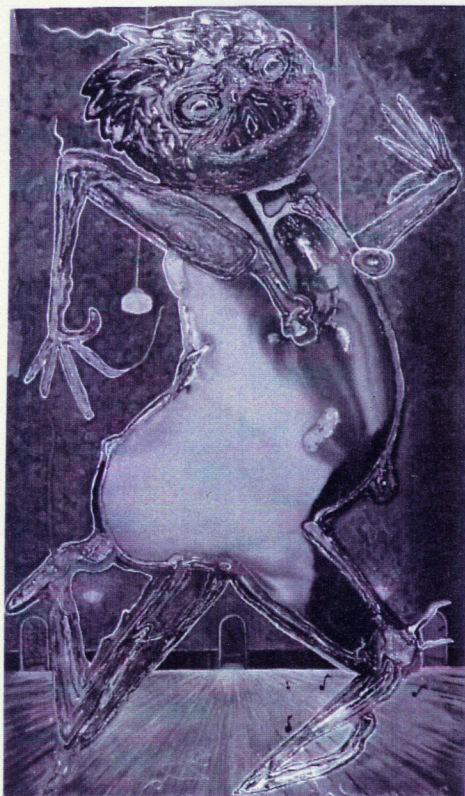
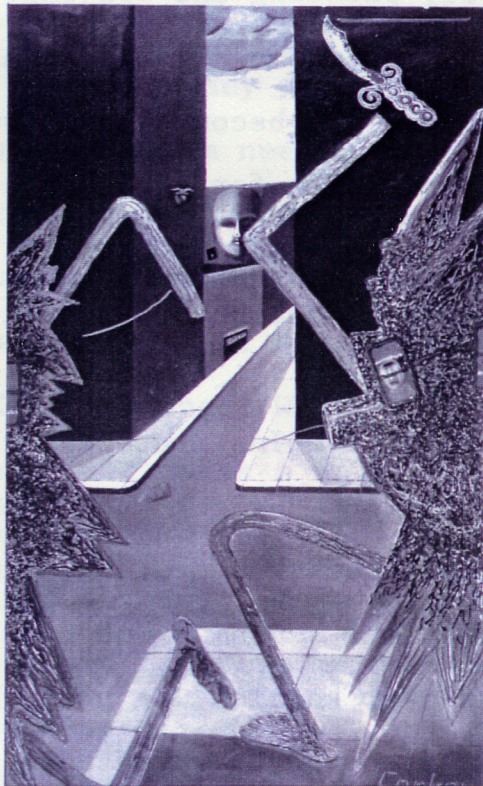


PSYCHO-FLUX REUNION



RICHARD SIMMONS, PSYCHO-FLUX REUNION, 6 panels, each app. 120"Hx70"W, 88-9, Acrylic

Richard Simmons '98

PSYCHO-FLUX REUNION

In the Summer of 1980 I was invited to teach in the video and performance art department at the San Francisco Art Institute. My own artistic output was primarily painting and drawing. However, my interest in video and performance had earned me a job screening such work for my hometown museum, the Everson. I had become well-known for my knowledge of avant-garde ideas, and my reputation for being discerning and articulate made me a valuable resource. I remained at the Art Institute until 1982, and declined a permanent position because of the strain on my family, who had remained in Syracuse.

The teaching atmosphere at the Institute was challenging and very rewarding. Students were ambitious, bright, and open. I didn't patronize them as students, but treated them as peers. This infused the class with critical responsibility. Emotions ran high but resulted in fresh, original gutsy work. When each three-hour session was over, those who weren't hospitalized ran to LaRocca's Corner to throw down a few.

Each night, after class I walked up Union to Leavenworth, to my apartment, and unwound with my pens and paper. I welcomed this light-hearted release from the arch-avant-garde intensity of my students. At the end of each semester I offered my students and friends their choice from the box of drawings, now affectionately called 'the cartoons'. The drawings remained in that box until 1988, when a visitor to my studio in Syracuse asked to see them. He became no less a lover of their free and fanciful qualities than I, and offered to sponsor six, larger-than-life paintings based on five of the cartoon characters and one new character. His offer afforded me several weeks of financial security and I happily jumped headlong into the project.

For the first time in fifteen years of expressionistic, unpremeditated painting, I was beginning with an impression. Each character already had a personality and offered suggestions like trustees of an unnamed institution.

After fifteen years of excitement and discovery in my work, I couldn't concede to a mere reproduction; large and impressive but without aesthetic principle or promise. I wanted something transcendent; something synergistically fertile which would invite considerations beyond a cursory 'oh, that's nice'. As they matured, they outgrew painting's assumed purpose of placating someone's decorative needs. Not unlike the performance artist, each had developed into a presence powerful enough to hold an audience hostage. Armed with suggestive captions, they could now attend to real issues like: what causes hostility? How long will we need a military? Why is that guy so mean? Can he change? Why are minorities so pissed-off? Why are prisons overcrowded? What makes a split personality? Why are so many of us self-destructive? How come the nice guy never wins? How radioactive is the air I'm breathing? Why don't more Afro-Americans listen to salsa? What is *mascara machismo* and is it in my neighborhood yet? How can an entire society need psychiatry?



Here are the finished paintings; all dressed up and out on the town. At first glance, they appear as strange and exotic aliens, but they are really warmhearted ambassadors. They are well-wishers from the artist's 'department of poetic animation'. They are ministers of the interior, offering syllogisms for society. Their motto: Mobility is a Metaphor.

The photograph on the preceeding page shows the newly finished series as it was installed in the lobby of Syracuse Stage in December, 1990. The exhibition was hosted by curator, Peter Sandwall, and Syracuse University's Department of Drama.

CAPTIONS: Reading left to right, from preceeding page;

POTEY "Really a nice guy with an accessible heart, Potey walks seemingly undaunted through a hostile environment."

BUGLE "Head poised as if to expel hot air, this advanced military figure sounds the alarm, but would rather be skating and dating, like Jefferson promissed."

BOTES "Former tough-guy bosuns' mate finds harmony in the Moon and jumps ship, using quintessential sea legs."

Interpretation: The picture, "Botes", uses the suggestion of infinite distance on the horizon to pound the figure forward, as if it might break free from its artificial limits and bounce miraculously into the viewers' space. The challenge of the viewers' supposed passivity is met by two more physiological elements; the commanding authority of the picture's larger-than-life presence, and the awkward and unpredictable angle of his body, which attempts to hold hostage, however briefly, the viewer's sense of balance and stability. Of course, very few of us can actually walk on water like "Botes" can. And, as we shrug off any possibility of a miracle, another look at his head reveals not one face but two faces. Similarly, another look at the Moon reveals not one phase but two phases. Face/Phase One shows the gruff sliver of a grimace and a crescent of astral light. Face/Phase Two happily basks in the illuminating light of the Full Moon. Could it be that this figure of a seafarin' man, isolated from society by occupation, wears the *mascara machismo* as an imagined defense against imagined aggressors? Does he yearn to drop his sociopathic anchor and experience the miracle of freedom? These and other sporty questions may surface in the socially optimistic series, "Psycho-Flux Reunion"; the resonance of changing psychologies.

FLORES "Hostile jailer, apparently oblivious to rich cultural sensibilities, throws unseen object at freedom-loving Latino."

CORKER "Explosive inner-city schizophrenic attempts to self-destruct, while zealots sell Bibles near Corky's."

CHORUS "Too ugly for crowds, loner has hellava-good time in plush, Chernobyl, ballroom."